60p

THE Unexplained

MYSTERIES OF MIND SPACE & TIME

Psi in the lab
Margo Williams, medium
The man who fell to earth
Secrets of the red planet
Alien contacts

75

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THE Unexplained
MYSTERIES OF MIND SPACE & TIME

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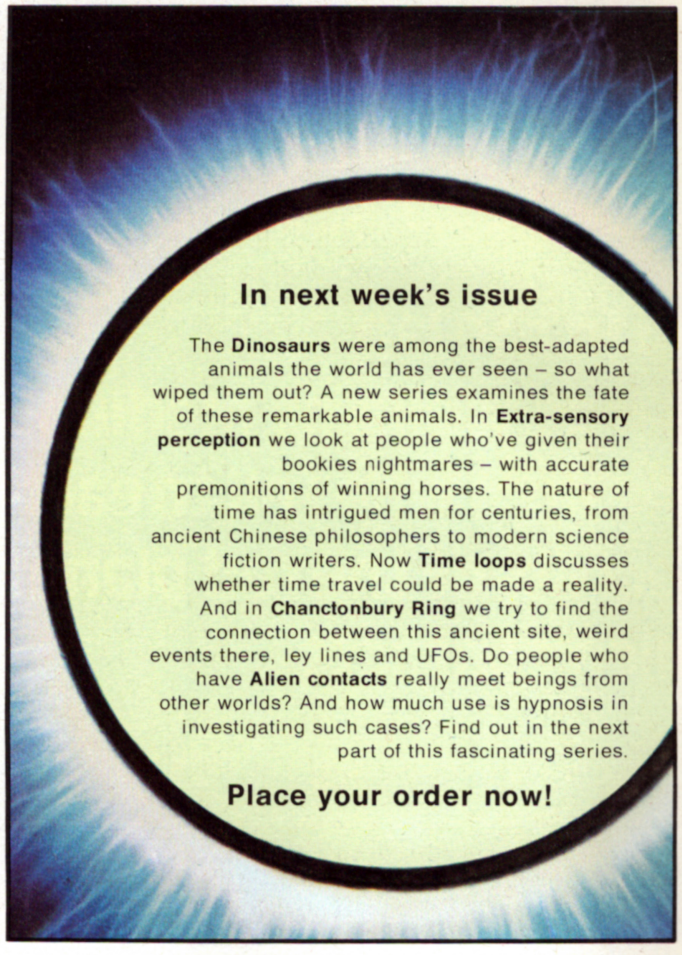

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Encounters of the fourth kind

Scientific attempts to make contact with intelligent life on other planets have so far been unsuccessful. But what of the evidence from people who claim to have met aliens? JENNY RANDLES examines their reports

ON A WET AND WINDY NIGHT in November 1980, Mario Luisi was walking through sodden meadows by a river outside his home village of Burneside in the English Lake District. In the darkness he saw what he took to be a cow. Then he thought it might be a crudely constructed sheep shelter. But then he saw that the object was hovering 3 feet (1 metre) above the ground and looked like nothing so much as a distorted aeroplane. It was about the size of a helicopter and had what seemed to be a tailplane, but no wings. It bore strange symbols, the like of which Luisi had never seen before.

As he stared at the weird object glinting in the beam of his lantern, he became aware of a squelching sound. He realised that someone was approaching him across the soggy ground and turned the beam of the lantern in the direction of the sound. He saw two figures, apparently human, about 6 feet (2 metres) away, beside an old oak tree. They were wearing dark, skin-tight suits. At that instant one of them, apparently female, raised a small pencil-shaped object in her hand. A bright light shot out from it, striking the face of Luisi's lantern. The glass front shattered and, as Luisi watched, the metal reflector became warped and twisted.

The remainder of Mario Luisi's encounter took place by the light from a paper mill on the other side of the river. The female figure spoke to him, telling him that she and her companion meant no harm and had come to the Earth in peace. (Presumably, then, their 'attack' was a defensive measure against what they had taken to be a weapon – the lantern.) Luisi was told that he must not reveal the strange symbols on the ship, nor those on the lapel badges worn by both figures. He could only stare, his legs shaking, as the two beings, who were fair-skinned, entered their craft by means of a ladder that descended from it. Presently the object shot upwards, leaving a glow in the sky.

The encounter left Mario Luisi with a memory that would change his outlook on life. For him, at least, there was no longer any doubt – no need to question whether the human race is alone in the Universe. He 'knew' that we are not.

This problem has fascinated mankind ever since it was realised, in the 16th century, that the planets are other worlds, and the stars are other suns, possibly possessing their own planets. The human race seems to abhor the idea of being alone in an immeasurably vast Universe. This sentiment was exploited to great effect by Steven Spielberg's epic film *Close encounters of the third kind*, which was released in 1977. Spielberg brought the idea vividly to life. He himself is keenly interested in UFOs and is associated with the Center for UFO Studies, in Evanston, Illinois, USA, which is run by J. Allen Hynek, a consultant to *The Unexplained*.

The most fantastic type of evidence on the question consists of the numerous accounts of close encounters of the fourth kind – of which Mario Luisi's is one. These go beyond close encounters of the third kind, in which aliens are merely seen: witnesses claim to

In this scene from Steven Spielberg's film *Close encounters of the third kind*, the protagonist enters a space-ship, surrounded by aliens who, although their only means of communication with human beings appears to be the repetition of a tune of five notes, are obviously benevolent. Despite its title, Spielberg's film deals with what UFO experts have labelled close encounters of the fourth kind – those in which there is intelligent contact with aliens

have met, talked to, travelled in company with, or even been abducted by creatures not of this world.

Four varieties of close encounters of the fourth kind have been distinguished. Mario Luisi's experience is typical of type A, which embraces straightforward encounters where the witness fully remembers what took place. There are no memory blocks, no intervals of time that the subject is unable to recall, no obvious reason to doubt that the experience was of something completely real. It is just as much a part of the sequence of events as getting up that morning.

These type A events are the most sober evidence for the reality of aliens. And they are by no means rare. Although close encounters of the fourth kind as a whole make up no more than about 1 or 2 per cent of the total number of UFO reports made each year, this still amounts to many hundreds of cases since the Second World War. They come from almost every country and all social groups. And over half of these encounters are of type A. It is thought that they could be even more common than the figures suggest, for there is evidence that witnesses are unwilling to talk about this kind of experience.

Seeing an unidentified light in the sky is almost commonplace these days, and people are more willing to report it than they once were. But talking to a creature from another world is, for many people, something to keep quiet about. This is unfortunate, since it means that researchers are unsure of the true scale of the phenomenon. But the information supplied by courageous witnesses is sufficient to indicate that something truly extraordinary is going on.

But serious problems arise, even in these seemingly rational type A accounts. The Mario Luisi case is typical in this respect. He volunteered the lantern for scientific study. The results of two independent analyses were identical: in the opinion of experts the damage was done by ordinary means, probably by a blow-torch. Had Luisi concocted his story and damaged the lantern himself, it would have been odd for him to be so co-operative. And it is not possible to disprove his claim, by which he stands, that the lantern was struck by a beam from an alien weapon.

Certain other points in Mario Luisi's story support his claims. But support is not proof: and we never do get proof in cases of close encounters of the fourth kind that a witness is not lying. The difficulty, of course, is that even if the witness is telling the truth, there is no guarantee that his alien contacts are not using materials and technology indistinguishable from our own. Nevertheless, when what is presented as evidence could perfectly well be of earthly origin, one is bound to become suspicious.

Science and the aliens

A number of researchers have been conducting studies into close encounters of the fourth kind, analysing the features of the stories in detail. Type A cases stand out from the other reports in many ways. They tend to occur outside the usual surroundings of the witness – in the open, perhaps in a field, and so on. They happen at any time of the day, even though UFOs are predominantly nocturnal. The average number of witnesses per case is well below the average for all UFO cases, but close to the average for all close encounters of the fourth kind.

Photographs purporting to show alien beings are, disappointingly, rare. This seems highly significant when it is remembered that UFO photographs are very numerous. If the

Left: two aliens allegedly visited a Lake District village one stormy November night in 1980. Disturbed by Mario Luisi on a night-time stroll, they apparently mistook his lamp for some kind of weapon, and destroyed it with a ray gun. Luisi later produced the damaged lamp as evidence (below left) – but expert analyses established that the damage could have been done with an ordinary blow-torch. On the other hand, there is no reason why an alien weapon should *not* have the same effect as a blow-torch!

number of pictures of aliens were in the same proportion as the number of contact cases – 1 or 2 per cent – then we would have a great deal of material to work on. In fact there are no more than two or three photographs and none that, beyond reasonable doubt, link an alien being with a UFO.

Yet we cannot complacently dismiss the phenomenon as unreal. For there are cases in which several witnesses see aliens. One example occurred on 3 March 1980, at Rio Pièdras, Puerto Rico. Two teenage children, Vivian and José Rodriguez, were woken at 3.30 a.m. by a barking dog. They looked through the window of their farm to see five strange creatures, with pointed ears and webbed feet, wearing tight-fitting clothes. The aliens seemed interested in the family's chickens. No UFO was observed by the children.

Next day it was discovered that at the same time of night two men nearby had seen the same creatures. The witnesses had been sleeping in a parked car, resting during a long journey. They had woken up and had seen a large domed object on the ground. Beings fitting the description given by the children had emerged from the object and headed in the direction of the Rodriguez farm.

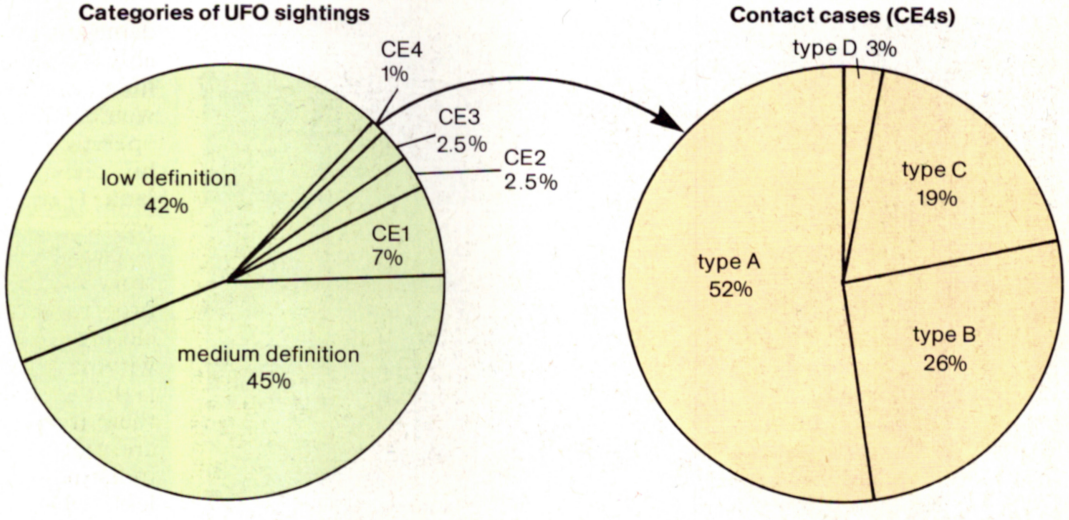
Such a story, if true, is very hard to explain as anything other than a real, physical event. The apparent subjectivity of these type A cases should not be overstressed.

The second group of contact cases, type B, is quite different. The aliens involved are often called 'bedroom visitors' because so many of them make their appearance in the bedroom; the witnesses usually claim to have experienced the encounter while wide awake. These encounters have a good deal in common with ghost sightings that happen in the bedroom.

What distinguishes these events from type A cases is that they possess obvious distortions of reality – parts of the sequence of events are completely forgotten, there are jumps in the story from one scene of action to another, as in a film or a dream. The reality of the events is much more doubtful than that of the type A cases.

For example, on 5 January 1980 a 33-year-old house-painter awoke at 5 a.m. in his bedroom at Trowbridge, Wiltshire, in southern England. He saw a glowing green figure, 7 feet (2.1 metres) tall, at the foot of his bed. It looked more like a projected image

Right: an analysis of UFO reports from the United Kingdom over the period from 1975 to 1979. Low definition cases are reports whose details are sparse, with only brightness, colour and movement clearly describable. Medium definition cases are those in which the object has a definite physical substance and shape. The remainder of cases are classified as close encounters (CEs). Close encounters of the fourth kind are, in turn, divided into four categories (far right)



	non-contact UFO sightings
average number of witnesses	2.19
sex of witnesses	68% male
most common place of occurrence	home environment
most common time of occurrence	peak at about 9 p.m.

contact cases (CE4s)		
type A	type B	type C
1.28	1.16	1.62
75% male	51% male	60% male
in the open	room inside a building	in a car on a country road
all times of day and night	peak at about 3 a.m.	peak at about 11 p.m.

Strange creatures with pointed ears and webbed feet seen examining chickens on a Puerto Rican farm on 3 March 1980 were also observed near their spacecraft (above). Although their purpose is mystifying, the account of the event itself is straightforward – putting it in the category of close encounter of the fourth kind known as 'type A'

than a solid figure. The alien told the witness that the people to whom he belonged regularly shipped human beings off to other worlds in order to colonise them. When a planet became overcrowded they started a war in order to reduce the population. This behaviour seemed to be in conflict with other efforts that they were making to protect us: it seemed that our planet was liable to split in half and the alien visitors were desperately trying to plug the cracks by injecting a liquid cement from their remotely controlled space vehicles!

Interestingly, the witness's wife was in bed beside him all this time, yet she did not awaken, nor did it occur to him to disturb her. It seems most unlikely that anyone would make up such a story and expect anyone to believe it. It is not necessary to doubt the witness's sincerity – but neither is it necessary to take this weird story at all seriously.

Type B cases are rarer than type A – they form about a quarter of all contact reports. They are far more subjective, since they are almost exclusively single-witness encounters. By far the majority of them occur in the home or its immediate surroundings – fully two thirds of the cases occur in the bedroom. And most of them happen in the early hours of the morning.

This seems to suggest that the two types of contact are different in nature: type A sound like real contacts with something physical; type B sound like some kind of hallucination. It seems a plausible working hypothesis, though there are cases in which it is hard to decide whether a case belongs to type A or type B.

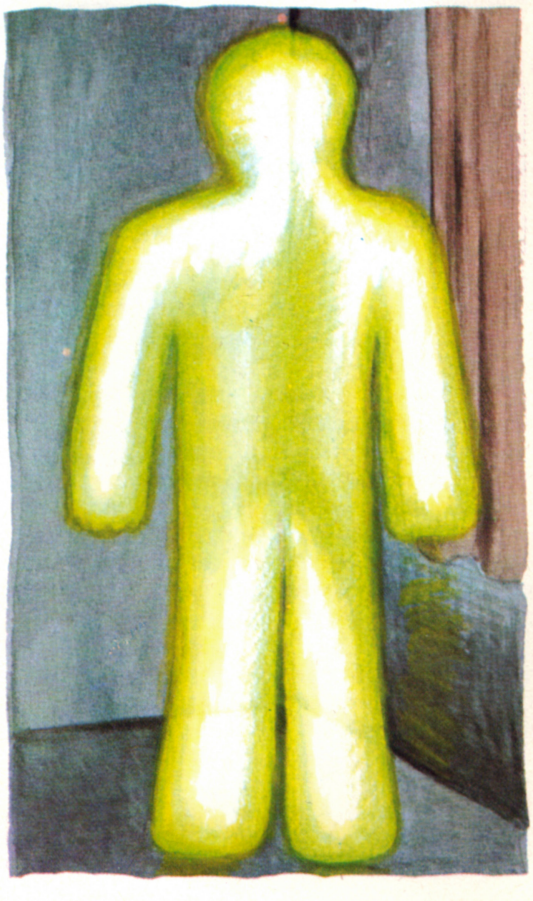
The third category of contact report, type C, involves an experience that is not immediately remembered. The experience of an English family, the Days, will illustrate how disturbing this can be.

Late-night encounter

One evening in October 1974, John and Sue Day were driving to their home at Aveley, in Essex. They had been visiting relatives and were now hurrying, hoping to catch a late-night television play. Their three children were with them and fell asleep during the journey. Then their parents saw a blue light pacing the car. They watched it for some time but were unable to identify what it could be.

Then the light disappeared – and the car turned a corner and ran into a well-defined bank of eerie green mist. The Days were in the mist for only a few seconds, but the car radio sparked and crackled. John instantly yanked out its wires to prevent a fire hazard. After recovering their composure the family drove the few hundred yards to their home.

When they got home they switched on their television set, but the screen remained blank. It was two hours later than they had

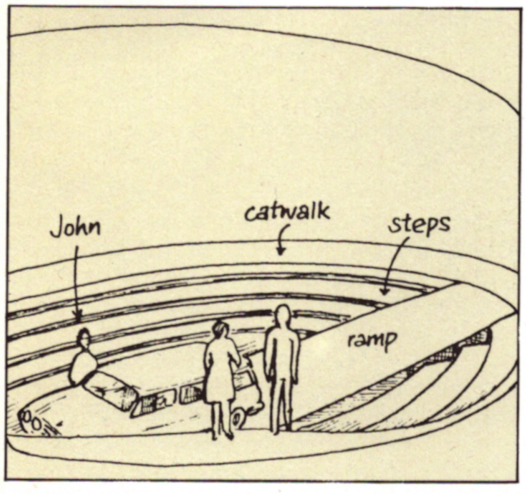


Right: a Trowbridge man claimed he was awoken by a tall, greenish alien in the early hours of 5 January 1980. The creature said he came from a planet where war is used to control the population level, and that he was trying to prevent the Earth splitting in half by injecting it with cement! This kind of close encounter of the fourth kind, with its obvious conflict with reality, belongs to the category labelled 'type B'

thought, and the station had closed down. Someone or something had stolen a piece of their lives.

The family were naturally perturbed by this mysterious time lapse. Over the next few months they had several dreams about it – fleeting visions of weird faces, occasional strange impulses to refrain from eating meat or drinking alcohol. Eventually two UFO investigators, Andy Collins and Barry King, heard of the event. They brought in the help of a medical hypnotist – Leonard Wilder, a London dentist. The Days underwent regression hypnosis in the hope of retrieving memories of that missing time. And the memories came.

Under hypnosis John and Sue told stories that were in close agreement. However, there were some differences, and they did indeed claim to have been separated for much of the 'missing' time. The children also seemed to recall the experience in subsequent dreams.



Perhaps the strangest category of close encounter of the fourth kind is that known as 'type C' – where the witnesses are subject to loss of memory following their experience. The Day family of Aveley, Essex, England, underwent this after the events of one October night in 1974. They were driving home when, they claimed, they encountered a UFO (left) that interfered with their car radio – so much, at least, they remembered afterwards. But when they arrived home, they found it was two hours later than they thought – and it subsequently emerged under hypnosis that they believed that they had been taken aboard a UFO by aliens (below) and subjected to medical examinations

A UFO had landed and the family had been taken on board. They were given medical examinations and shown around the craft. They were informed about its propulsion system and the way of life and intentions of the alien visitors. Eventually they were returned to their car by a process akin to astral projection, and they continued their journey. But their lives could never be the same again.

To those who interviewed them, the Day family seemed a group of pleasant and sincere people who had never tried to force their story onto anyone, or to make money from it. Something quite certainly happened to them that night . . . but what?

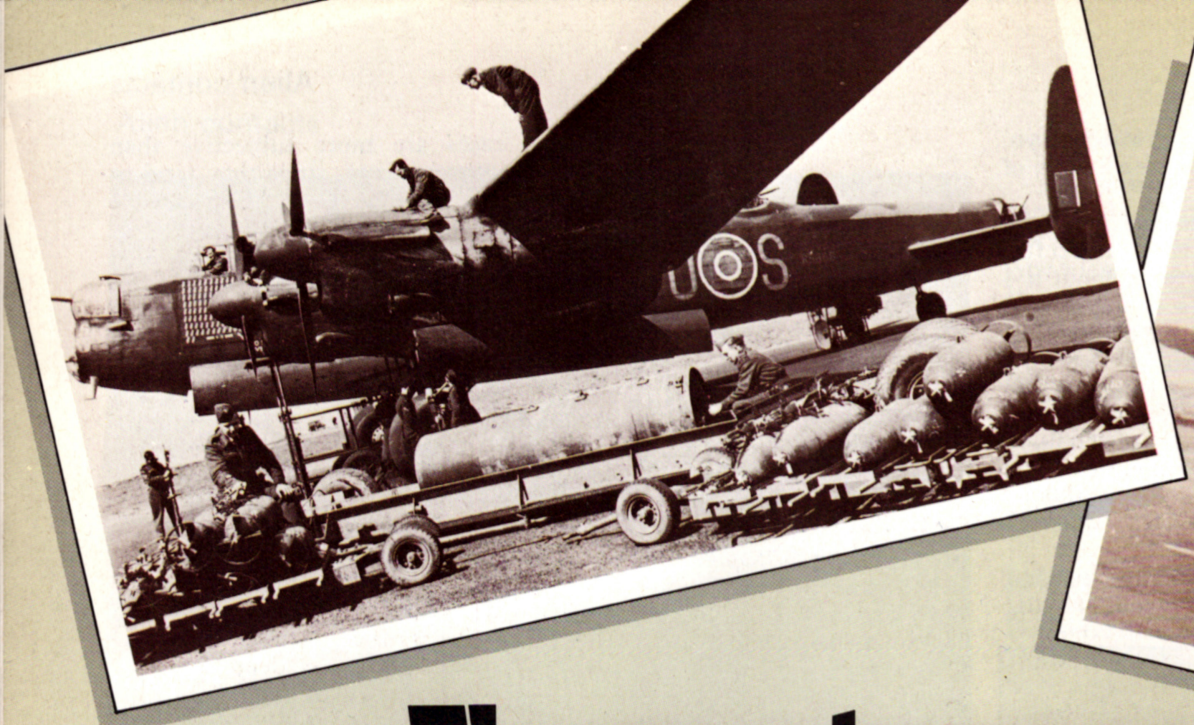
In type C contacts, something blocks the witnesses' memory. Occasionally recall of the 'missing' events is triggered by normal events. Not infrequently the subject has dreams that hint at what took place during the missing minutes, hours – or even, in a very few instances, days. But the most common means by which the floodgates of memory are opened is regression hypnosis.

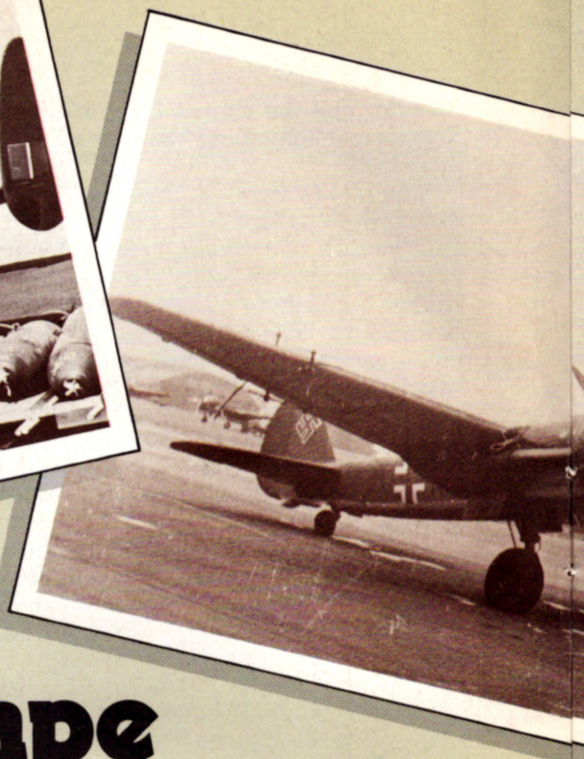
Type C abductions are remarkably consistent. One in five stories of alien contact involves amnesia and alleged abduction.

Type C cases are more subjective than ordinary UFO sightings, since they tend to involve fewer witnesses; but they have a higher number of witnesses per case than type B or, surprisingly, type A cases. The aliens involved usually resemble human beings and are usually the normal human size, or larger; there are very few entities of small stature, unlike those featured in type A cases. The most common time for type C incidents to occur is between about 10 p.m. and midnight. And a very large proportion of them involve young couples driving cars along quiet roads (quite often carrying children with them). It is also common for one or more of the witnesses to have a history of strange experiences – witnessing ghosts or poltergeists, for example. And the way of life of the subjects may undergo drastic changes, even before the memory of an apparent abduction is at last retrieved and the cause of the changes made apparent.

The fourth group of close encounters of the fourth kind comprises very few cases. It consists of those experiences in which the encounter does not seem to involve physical contact: communication is by means of telepathy, automatic writing, or something of the kind. We shall not discuss these in this series of articles. We shall try instead to see whether among all the details of the cases of types A, B and C there is a clue to the reasons why such experiences occur.

Why are aliens who come from light years away so similar to us? See page 1506





The great escape

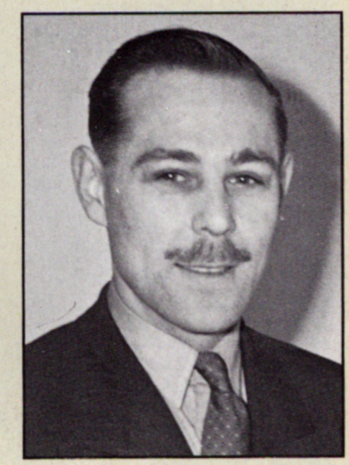
When his parachute went up in flames 18,000 feet above Berlin, Flight Sergeant Nicholas Alkemade decided to jump rather than burn to death. The miracle was, as BEALE McIVER reveals, that he survived to tell the tale

FLIGHT SERGEANT Nicholas Alkemade was a little nervous at the thought that this was to be his thirteenth bombing mission over Germany. Just 21 years old, he had the loneliest, most dangerous job in RAF Bomber Command: tail-gunner in a Lancaster. Still, he and the crew of *S for Sugar* had survived so far.

Besides the danger, being tail-gunner in a Lancaster was uncomfortable. There was room enough in that tiny perspex bubble for the gunner, his ammunition and four Browning machine guns. And that was all. Even the parachute had to be stowed outside the turret. At 20,000 feet (6000 metres) it could get very cold indeed – and 24 March 1944 was a chilly spring night.

Little bothered the flight from 115 Squadron as they droned over the German mainland. A little flak above Frankfurt, then Berlin – already lit up by Pathfinder flares and the sharp beams of searchlights trying to ensnare the 300 Allied bombers that had come to pound the beleaguered enemy capital that night. At last, Alkemade heard the magic words: 'Bombs away!' Two tonnes of high explosive and nearly three of incendiaries dropped away. At once the pilot, Jack Newman, turned the big plane toward home and safety.

There was one massive explosion. Then cannon shells tearing down the fuselage towards Alkemade. Two ripped through his turret, shattering the perspex. Splinters dug into him. Then he saw the attacker: a lone Junkers 88, closing in now to finish off the wounded bomber. Alkemade aimed and fired, his tracer arcing toward the enemy, now only 50 yards (45 metres) distant. The Junker's port engine exploded and it dipped away, doomed. Alkemade was elated.



Top left: an Avro Lancaster bomber. Capable in some versions of carrying 10 tonnes of bombs, it was used against German industry as well as in incendiary raids on enemy cities – like the one Sgt Alkemade flew in March 1944

Top right: the versatile Junkers 88 was adapted to many combat roles. A night fighter version crippled Alkemade's *S for Sugar* – and brought about a miracle

Above: Nicholas Alkemade, alive and well despite several close encounters with death

Not for long. Flames were already leaping past the remains of his turret. In a moment Jack Newman's voice came over the intercom: 'You'll have to jump for it. Bail out. Bail out.' Unfortunately, that, for Alkemade, meant retrieving his parachute from its rack behind him – somewhere amid those tongues of fire. He shoved open the doors into the fuselage momentarily and gaped at the blaze within. But this was his only hope. He tried again, spotted the parachute – then watched in horror as it disintegrated in flames.

'My stomach seemed to drop out of my body,' he said. 'I now knew that I was going to die. I said to myself, "You've had your lot."'

But not, he decided, by being burnt to death. 'Better a quick, clean death than frying.' Nicholas Alkemade was going to jump. Tearing off his already melting oxygen mask, he managed to manoeuvre the turret so that the hole faced toward the rear again. Then he somersaulted backwards into space.

Sheer relief at once replaced the terror. Alkemade felt perfectly calm. As he later put it: 'It was perfectly quiet and cool, like resting on a cloud . . . as though I was lowered onto a super-soft mattress. There was no sensation of falling. . . . I thought, well, if this is dying, it's not so bad.'

Indeed he felt so peaceful that he was able to calculate that from 18,000 feet (5500 metres) it would take him 90 seconds to hit the ground. And he had been looking forward to his next leave in a week's time. Now he wouldn't be seeing his girlfriend Pearl. Lying on his back in the air, he gazed at the

Below: the cramped quarters of a Lancaster's tail gun bubble. A rear gunner was known in the RAF as 'arse-end Charlie' – an attempt at humour that failed to disguise the high mortality rate that went with the job

Below right: the airman's view of an incendiary raid on a sleeping German city. These attacks were intended to demoralise the civilian population. Though very destructive, they failed in their psychological objective

stars and thought how foolish Man's struggles seemed. Then he passed out.

Alkemade couldn't understand why he felt so cold. He was supposed to be dead. He opened an eye. A star shone through the fir trees above him. He dug out his cigarette case and lighter, suddenly desperate for a smoke, then checked the time. It was 3.10 a.m. and he had been unconscious for three hours. 'Jesus Christ,' he said out loud. 'I'm alive.'

Somehow, the trees had broken his fall. Eighteen inches (45 centimetres) of snow made a final cushion. He had dropped over 3 miles (5 kilometres) out of the sky and lived to tell the tale. Not only that – he was hardly damaged at all. Some burns, a badly twisted right knee, but everything else seemed to work. He couldn't walk, and then began to worry about exposure. 'The prospect of being a POW didn't seem so bad. I wanted to be found.'

Members of the local *Volkssturm* heard the blasts from his regulation whistle, and found him still smoking his cigarette. When they picked him up he fainted. And then the problems began.

He was taken to hospital, and tried to explain what had happened to a doctor. 'Nix parachute,' he announced. The doctor smiled mirthlessly and tapped his head gently. Obviously Alkemade was mad. At Dalag Luft POW camp near Frankfurt it was no better. Alkemade suffered three interrogations and solitary confinement for sticking to his unbelievable story. He was clearly lying, and just as clearly he was really a spy.

But Alkemade heard that a Lancaster had been reported crashing on the night of 24 March near where he was found. Perhaps it was *S for Sugar*. And perhaps the remains of his parachute could be found in the wreck. Leutnant Hans Feidal of the Luftwaffe was eventually persuaded to look into the story. Sure enough, the harness of the tail-gunner's parachute was there, and was brought back. Alkemade tried it on. The snaphooks and lift webbing were still tied down with thread – and would have broken had the parachute been opened. Then the Germans found the scorched handle of the ripcord in the wreckage. The camp commandant could only pronounce Alkemade's escape a miracle.

His fellow prisoners later presented him with the flyleaf of a Bible. On it was written:

DALAG LUFT

It has been investigated and corroborated by the German authorities that the claim made by Sergeant Alkemade 1431537 RAF, is true in all respects, namely that he made a descent from 18,000 feet without parachute and made a safe landing without injury, his parachute having been on fire in the aircraft. He landed in deep snow among fir trees.

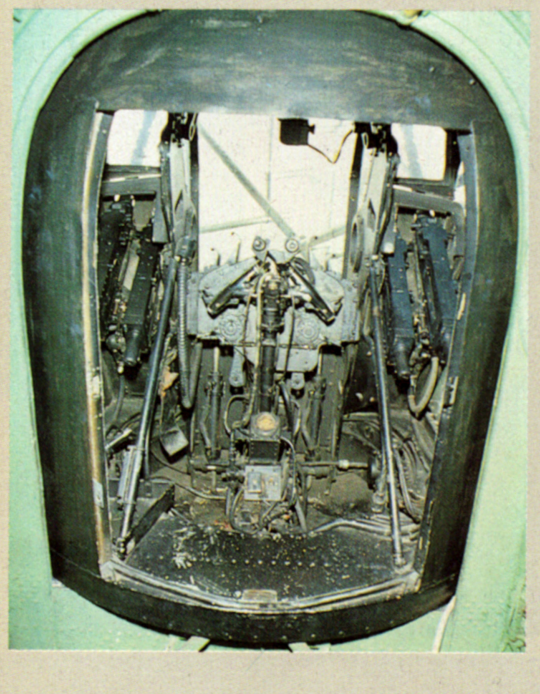
Corroboration witnessed by:

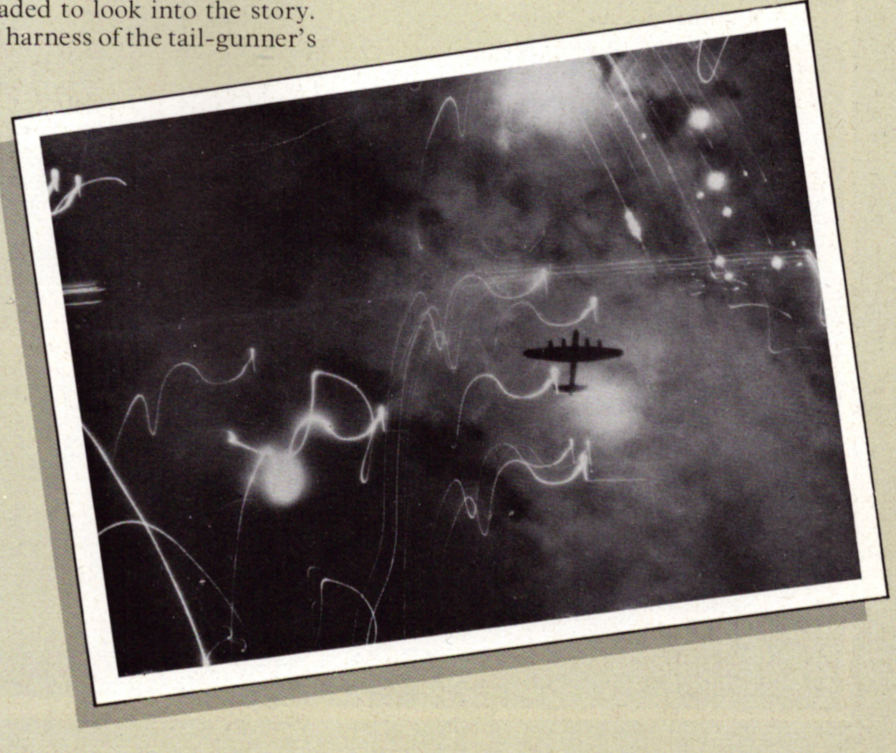
Flt Lt H. J. Moore, Senior British Officer.

Flt Sgt R. R. Lamb 1339582.

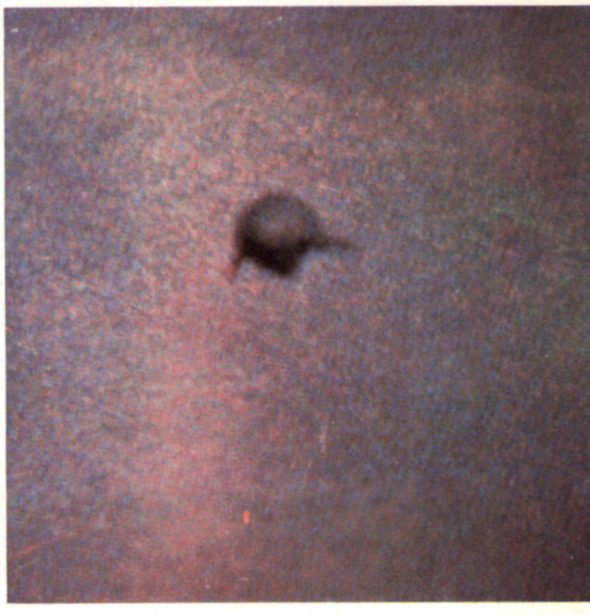
Flt Sgt T. A. Jones 411 Senior British NCO. Date 25.4.44.

Nicholas Alkemade survived his thirteenth bombing mission, against all the odds. And he continued to live a charmed life. He worked in a chemical factory in his home town of Loughborough after the war. Once a 224-pound (100-kilogram) steel girder fell on him. He was hauled out for dead, but walked away with a bruised scalp. On another occasion he was drenched with sulphuric acid. He had an electric shock that threw him into a hole where he lay breathing chlorine gas for a quarter of an hour, and lived to tell that tale as well. Someone, somewhere, is looking after Nicholas Alkemade.



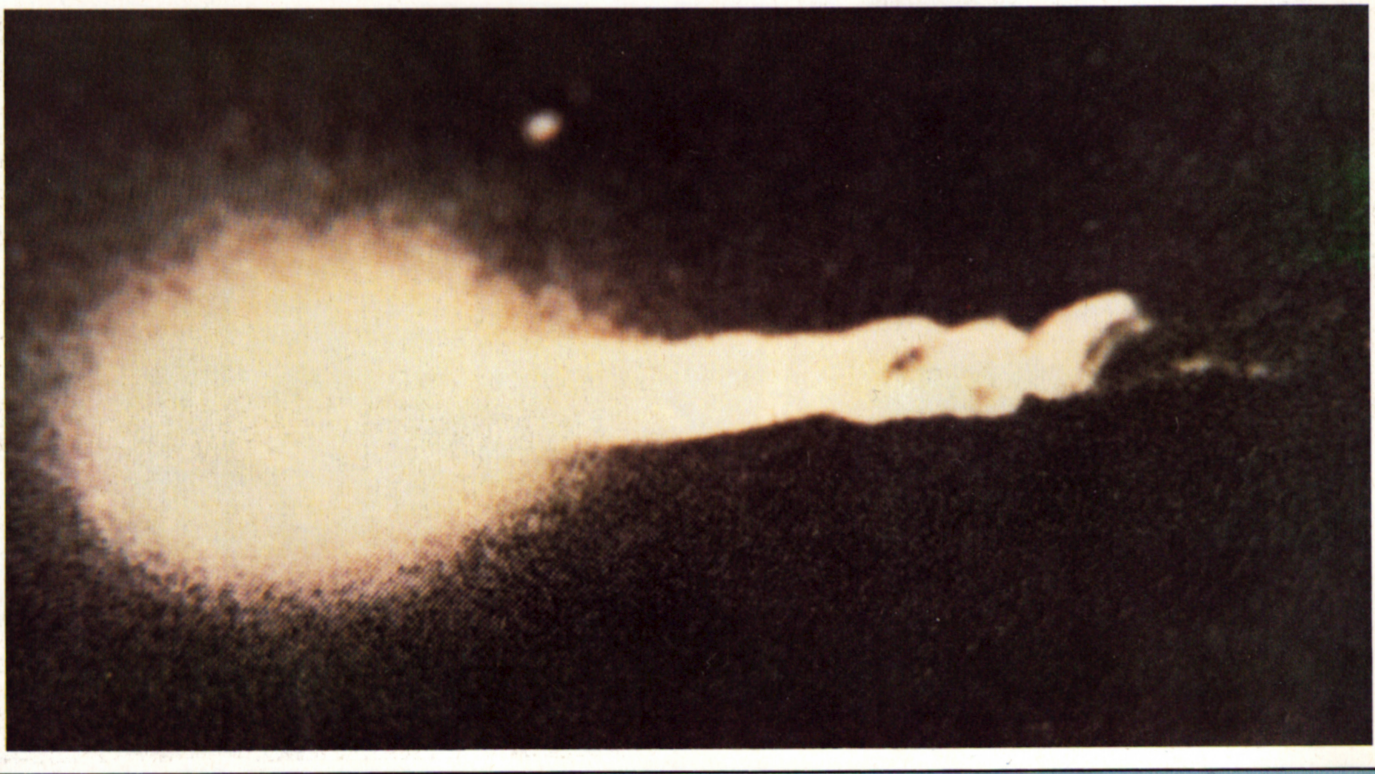


UFO Photo File



Left: one of the two photographs taken of a daylight disc by a Mr Smith in Calgary, Canada, on 3 July 1967. Both photographs were analysed by Ground Saucer Watch but some time apart. The first photograph passed the tests with flying colours and was publicly announced to be 'genuine'. However, on analysing the second, GSW concluded that the film 'depicts the crudest attempt at a hoax that we have ever seen'. This contradictory analysis illustrates the limitations of GSW's computer analysis technique.

Below: a photograph of what appeared to be 'a slow moving fireball' taken by Mr Sutton of Piedmont, Missouri, USA, on 22 March 1973. There was no known conventional or astronomical explanation of the sighting.



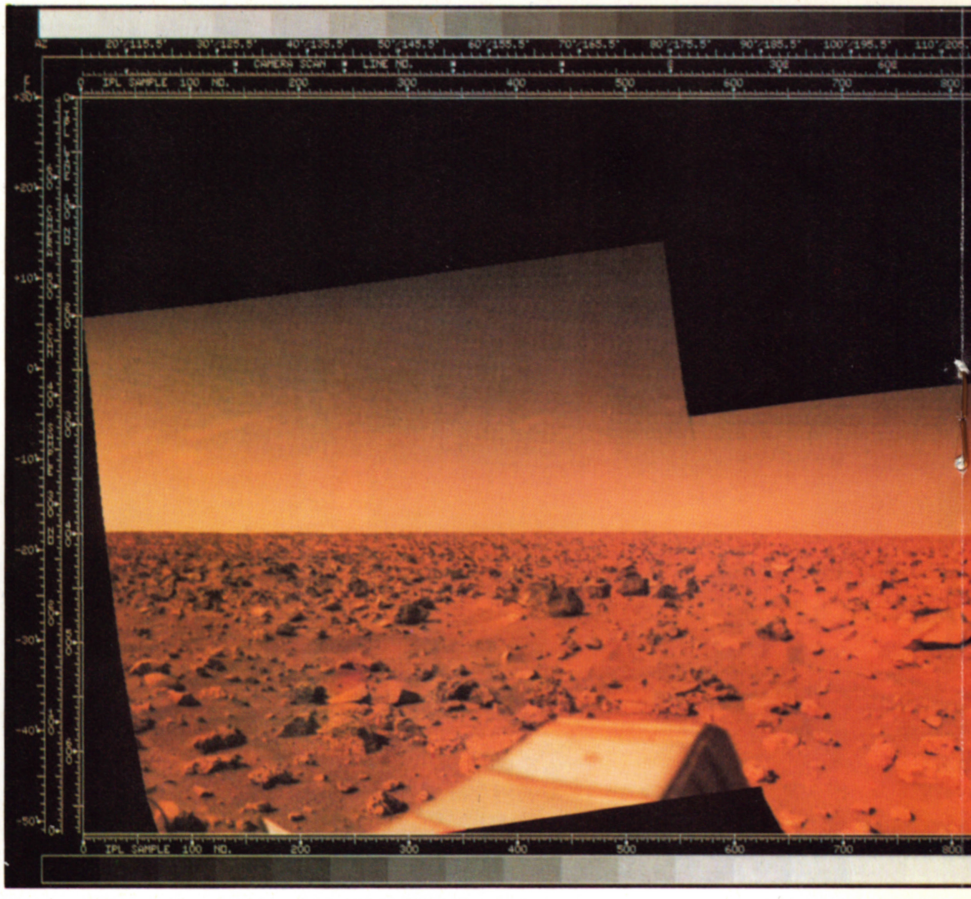
Left: UFO photographed near Cocoyoc, Mexico, on 3 November 1973. The witnesses (who wished to remain anonymous) noted that it appeared to be about 30 feet (10 metres) across. GSW concluded that the UFO was some kind of 'structured vehicle' such as a military 'drone' that is used for meteorological purposes. Most people are unfamiliar with modern military hardware, which frequently results in reports of 'UFO' sightings being made.

Right: a disc-shaped UFO photographed by Mr Mylderman in Namur, Belgium, on 5 June 1955. High in the sky, the object moved erratically and emitted a vapour trail.

Below: photographer Bill Burson caught this UFO (bright streak, centre) as it hovered over Pelham, Georgia, USA, on the night of 31 August 1973. There were many witnesses – including several police officers of the four south Georgia cities over which it was seen. The other streaks are stars, the effect being caused by the movement of the Earth during the photographic exposure. Although many explanations were put forward, the object remains unidentified.

Above: a daylight disc photographed by Mr W.N. Henry during mid August 1978 over the Dolomite Mountains, Italy. Mr Henry, a New Zealander on holiday in Europe, has 'been involved in the photographic field for eight years' and, although intrigued by the object – which he described as being silver and spherical – thinks it might have been a hot air balloon. Yet, as in the case of so many UFO pictures, the object was not seen by Mr Henry when he took the photograph.

Two American spacecraft made the journey to Mars to search for life. For months they tested the soil, incubating samples of it to encourage the growth of any micro-organisms that might be present. IAN RIDPATH describes their enigmatic findings

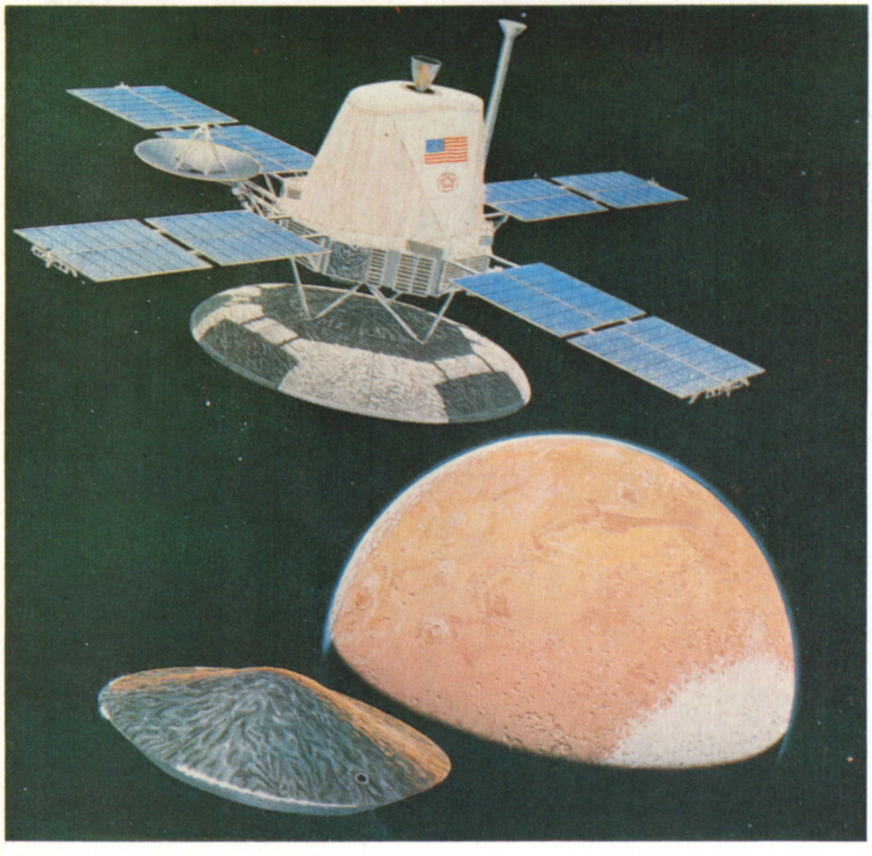


Secrets of the red planet

THE AMERICAN VIKING I spacecraft touched down on the red sands of Mars on 20 July 1976. It opened its electronic eyes to scan the landscape, sniffed the air and reached out a mechanical arm to scoop up handfuls of soil for analysis by an on-board automatic laboratory. It had begun the search for life on the red planet.

Viking's mission had begun 11 months before, when it was launched from Cape Canaveral in Florida. A second, identical Viking had been launched three weeks after the first. Each probe consisted of two vehicles: a lander, which would actually touch down on the surface, and an orbiter, which would remain in orbit above Mars, scanning the planet and relaying signals between the lander and Earth.

After a 10-month voyage Viking 1 arrived in orbit around Mars. Several promising landing sites had been selected before the mission began, with the aid of pictures taken by the earlier Mariner 9 probe. Lowland areas were chosen, where temperatures would be highest and where there should be most moisture.

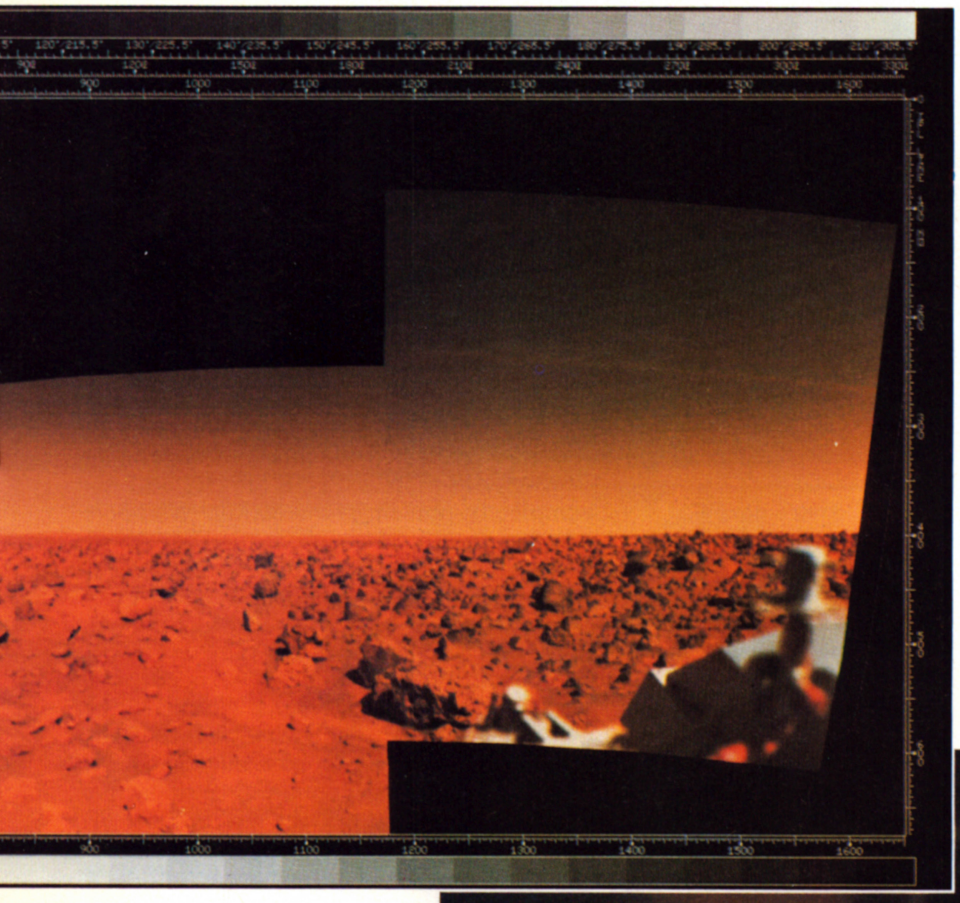


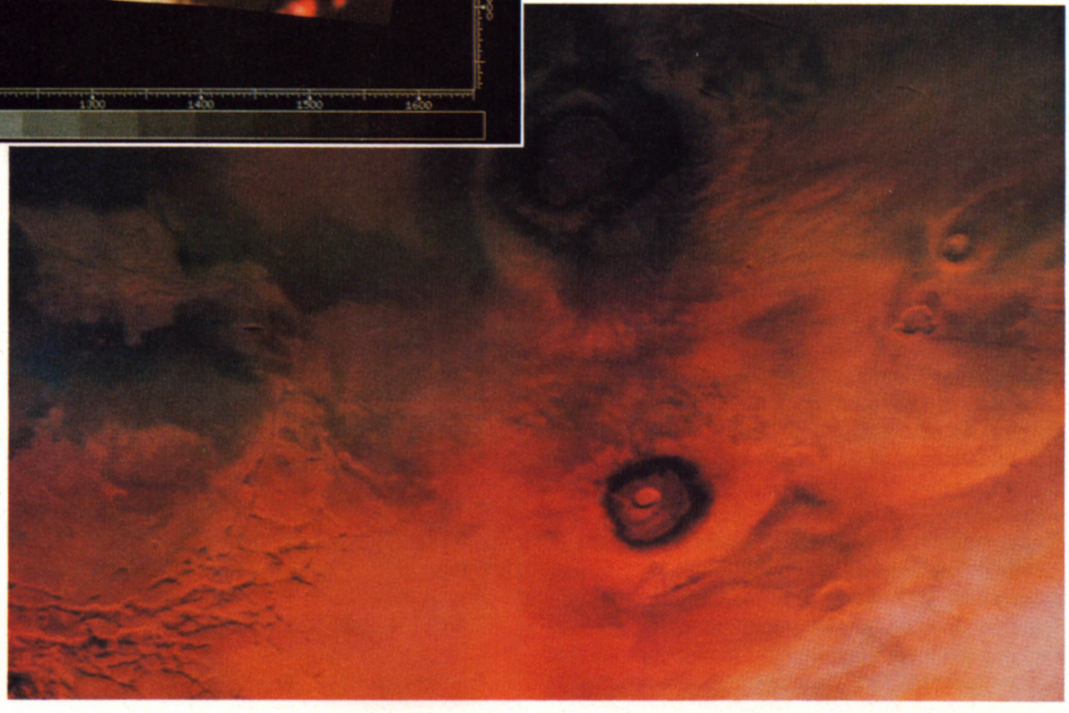
The areas also needed to be flat and rock-free to ensure a safe touchdown: the three-legged lander had a ground clearance of only 9 inches (23 centimetres). But as Viking took a closer look at the intended landing sites from orbit, it became clear that they were not nearly as smooth as had been hoped. The landing was delayed while the hunt went on for a safer alternative.

Eventually Viking 1's lander was targeted to a lowland basin called Chryse – 'land of gold' – at 22.27°N, 47.94°W. The Chryse basin looked as though it had been flooded in the past, when Mars was wetter.

Under the control of its onboard computer, Viking 1's lander separated from the orbiter and plunged into the Martian atmosphere. Ground control could not provide help if the lander ran into trouble, because it would take nearly 20 minutes for signals reporting the trouble to travel from the lander to the Earth, and another 20 minutes for answering signals to return from Earth.

At an altitude of 3.6 miles (5.8 kilometres) the shield that protected the lander from heat generated by atmospheric friction fell away





Above: the surface of Mars on 14 September 1976, in a mosaic of pictures from the Viking II television cameras. The thin atmosphere, consisting almost wholly of carbon dioxide, is unbreathable. The temperature is below freezing point, and what little water exists on the planet is far away, 'locked up' in the polar caps

Right: the Tharsis Ridge, once a volcanically active area of Mars, as seen by the Viking I orbiter. The volcanoes rise an average of 11 miles (17 kilometres) above the ridge. A labyrinth of geological faults is visible at lower left. Clouds veil the landscape at lower right

Left: an artist's rendering of Viking I in orbit around Mars after a journey of 505 million miles (810 million kilometres). The lander, in its 'aeroshell', which will protect it during the descent, has just separated from the orbiter

mineral that is the main component of sand.)

Alas, as the strings of numbers transmitted by Viking I were decoded and translated into colour pictures on Earth, it became clear that Mars was not exciting – to the biologist, at any rate. The surface of the planet resembled a rocky desert in Arizona or Peru. No living creatures could be seen.

Some people had speculated that life on other planets might be based on silicon, rather than on carbon, as Earth life is. In that case, such creatures might resemble rocks – and there are many rocks strewn over the surface of Mars. Viking pictures taken over many months have been carefully compared, but none of the rocks has moved. . . .

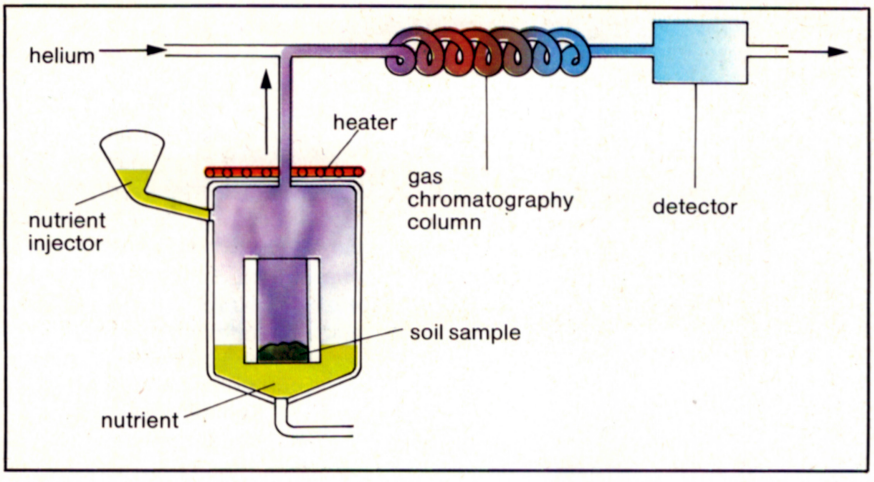
The sands of Mars turned out to be very red indeed. The explanation had been correctly foreseen: they contain large amounts of iron oxide – familiar on Earth as rust. One surprise was the pink colour of the sky, caused by fine dust particles suspended in the thin atmosphere.

Viking's meteorological instruments gave evidence of the harsh conditions on Mars. The maximum temperature recorded at Chryse was −9°F (−23°C), on a summer afternoon. Just before dawn, the temperature had fallen to a low of −121°F (−85°C). Viking II, which landed in September 1976, came down farther north and on the far side of the planet, in an area called Utopia (47.67°N, 225.71°W). There, as the Martian winter set in, the temperature fell below −184°F (−120°C), so low that the atmosphere began to freeze, forming carbon dioxide frost on the ground. At neither of the Viking landing sites does the temperature ever exceed freezing point.

The atmospheric pressure at both sites was 7.5 millibars, equal to the air pressure 22 miles

and the craft continued its descent under a huge parachute – 55 feet (16.8 metres) in diameter – to get as much drag as possible from the thin Martian air. Small braking rockets softened the final touchdown. Viking had arrived safely on the surface of Mars, the planet most likely to harbour life.

Some optimistic scientists had claimed that organisms large enough to be visible to Viking's cameras could exist on the surface. These organisms, they speculated, could have deep tap roots sinking into a permafrost layer, and might protect themselves from the Sun's ultraviolet radiation by silica domes, like sunshades. (Silica is the hard, glassy



(35 kilometres) above the Earth – four times the height of Mount Everest.

One spark of hope for biologists came from the measurements of the composition of the atmosphere. The Martian air turned out to contain 2.5 per cent nitrogen in addition to the 95 per cent carbon dioxide that was already known. All three ingredients essential to life – nitrogen, carbon dioxide and water – were now known to exist on the planet. Viking's measurements suggested that Mars had a more substantial atmosphere in the past, and hence conditions may once have been conducive to the appearance of living things.

Could there be micro-organisms – 'little green bugs' – living in the Martian sands? This was what Viking's biology laboratory was designed to find out. The extendable arm could reach as much as 10 feet (3 metres) from the lander to collect samples of soil, and these could be treated in three different ways in an attempt to make Martian bugs develop. The two landers carried out the same experiments at the different sites. Both had, of course, been sterilised before they were launched so that they would not take terrestrial bugs to Mars.

In one test, called the gas-exchange experiment, the soil was fed with a broth of nutrients, popularly called 'chicken soup'. As the first drops of nutrient were added, oxygen and carbon dioxide gushed from the soil sample. When more nutrient was added, more carbon dioxide was given out, but the flow of oxygen ceased.

Were Martian micro-organisms feeding on the chicken soup and giving off gases as they breathed and reproduced? Unfortunately not. The experimenters soon found that the gases were being produced by reactions between the nutrient and the soil that did not involve life.

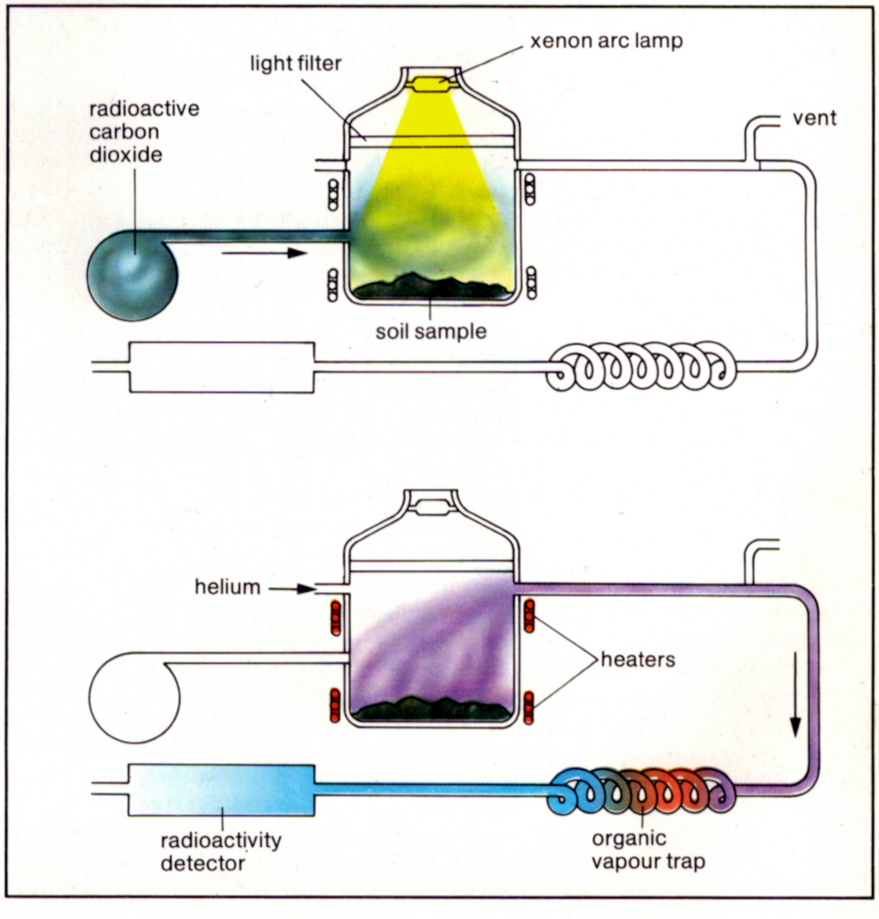
Another test for life, the pyrolytic release experiment, looked for evidence of photosynthesis by plant cells in the soil. In photosynthesis carbon dioxide is absorbed from the atmosphere. A Martian soil sample was incubated with the nutrient in an atmosphere of carbon dioxide that had been 'labelled' with radioactive carbon atoms. Then the soil was strongly heated (pyrolysed) to break it down and release any carbon that it had absorbed. This carbon could be detected by its radioactivity.

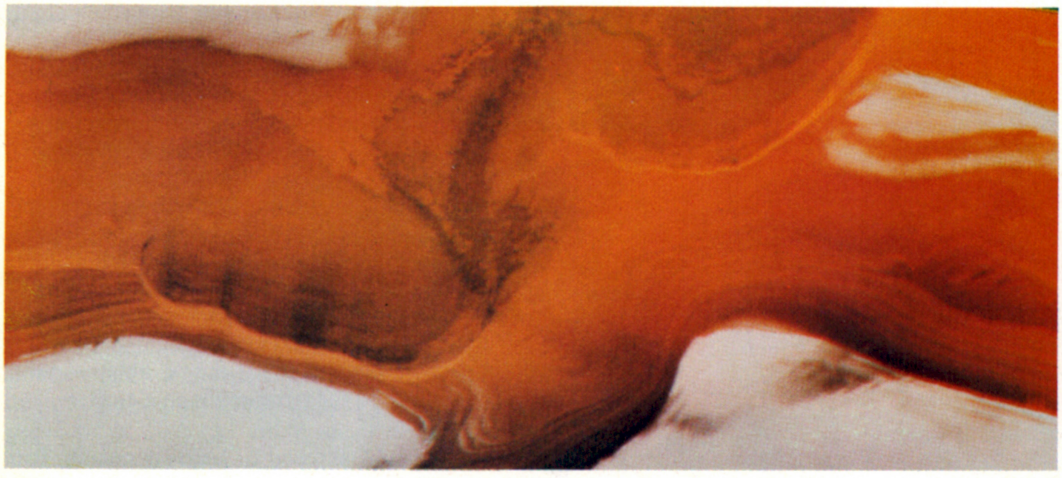
Above: Viking's gas-exchange experiment. The soil sample was incubated for months with a nutrient solution. The gases in the chamber were periodically swept through a gas chromatography column by a stream of helium gas. The column separated the gases into their components, and a detector identified them

The Viking instruments found that small amounts of carbon were indeed taken up from the atmosphere, as though a scattering of plant-like organisms were living in the Martian soil. To check this, one sample was heated to 195°F (90°C) before it was incubated. Such a high temperature should have been sufficient to kill any organisms, particularly since they would be adapted to living in the permanently sub-zero temperatures of Mars. But the carbon uptake of the soil was unaffected by this heat treatment. Even sterilisation at 345°F (175°C) did not completely prevent the reaction. Whatever was responsible for the absorption of carbon, it could not be life. Once again the experimenters concluded that chemical reactions in the soil were responsible, although they could not specify what they were.

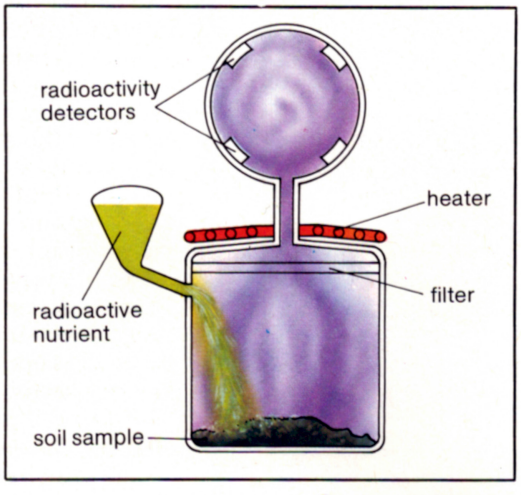
The third of the biological tests gave the most controversial results. Called the labelled-release experiment, it worked in the opposite way to the pyrolytic release experiment. A nutrient containing radioactive carbon was injected into the soil, and the gas over the sample was monitored to see whether radioactive carbon was given off, as it would be if Martian micro-organisms were feeding on the nutrient.

Results were immediate and exciting.





Left: a 'contour map' of the terrain near the Martian North Pole is marked out by frost. The polar caps consist of water ice, usually covered with frozen carbon dioxide. In mid summer, however, when this picture was taken, the carbon dioxide coating evaporates. Future expeditions, perhaps using robot vehicles, will undoubtedly search the polar areas for life



Right: the labelled-release experiment. The nutrient was 'labelled' with radioactive carbon. If this were to be used by micro-organisms in the soil, it would be released in gaseous waste products. These would pass into the upper chamber where their radioactivity would be detected. Then the soil could be strongly heated to see whether the reaction stopped, which would be expected to happen only if organisms were responsible for it

Left: the pyrolytic release experiment. A soil sample was illuminated with simulated Martian sunlight in an atmosphere of carbon dioxide, 'labelled' with radioactivity. Then it was broken down by intense heat and the gases given off were swept out of the chamber by a stream of helium. Gases resulting from the breakdown of living things would be retained by the organic vapour trap, to be released and detected later by their radioactivity

Enough radioactive carbon was given off to suggest that a thinly spread population of Martian organisms existed in the soil. Another sample, heat-sterilised at 320°F (160°C), which should have been sufficient to kill off any bugs, showed no such reaction.

Viking heated another soil sample to 120°F (50°C), which led to a halving of the rate of the reaction. This was puzzling. Did it mean that Martian life was present, and was resistant to this temperature, which was far outside the range to which the organisms would normally be exposed? Or was it due to chemical reactions between the soil and the nutrient?

To assess the biological experiments, it is necessary to take into account the results from an instrument called the gas chromatograph mass spectrometer (GCMS), which analysed the Martian soil in search of heavy, complex molecules that could make up the bodies of living organisms. Even if the chemistry of Martian life were quite different from that of Earth life, this instrument should have been able to detect its presence. Two soil samples were examined by the GCMS at each site. The results were negative each time: only carbon dioxide and oxygen were detected in the soil, nothing else.

This unfavourable result, together with the inconclusive findings of the other experiments, has led most investigators to conclude that life does not exist on Mars. However, the matter is not finally closed. The originators of the labelled-release experiment, Gilbert Levin and Patricia Straat, have subsequently spent years trying to duplicate the results of their test, using simulated Martian soils, but without success. Their failure to find a satisfactory explanation not involving life leads them to argue that their Viking experiment may indeed have detected biological activity on Mars. Their labelled-release experiment is far more sensitive than the GCMS, and succeeded in finding living organisms on Antarctic soils when the GCMS failed. Levin and Straat note that some terrestrial organisms, including algae, lichens, fungi and bacteria, are capable of surviving in conditions as bad as those to be found on Mars – in dry Antarctic valleys, for instance.

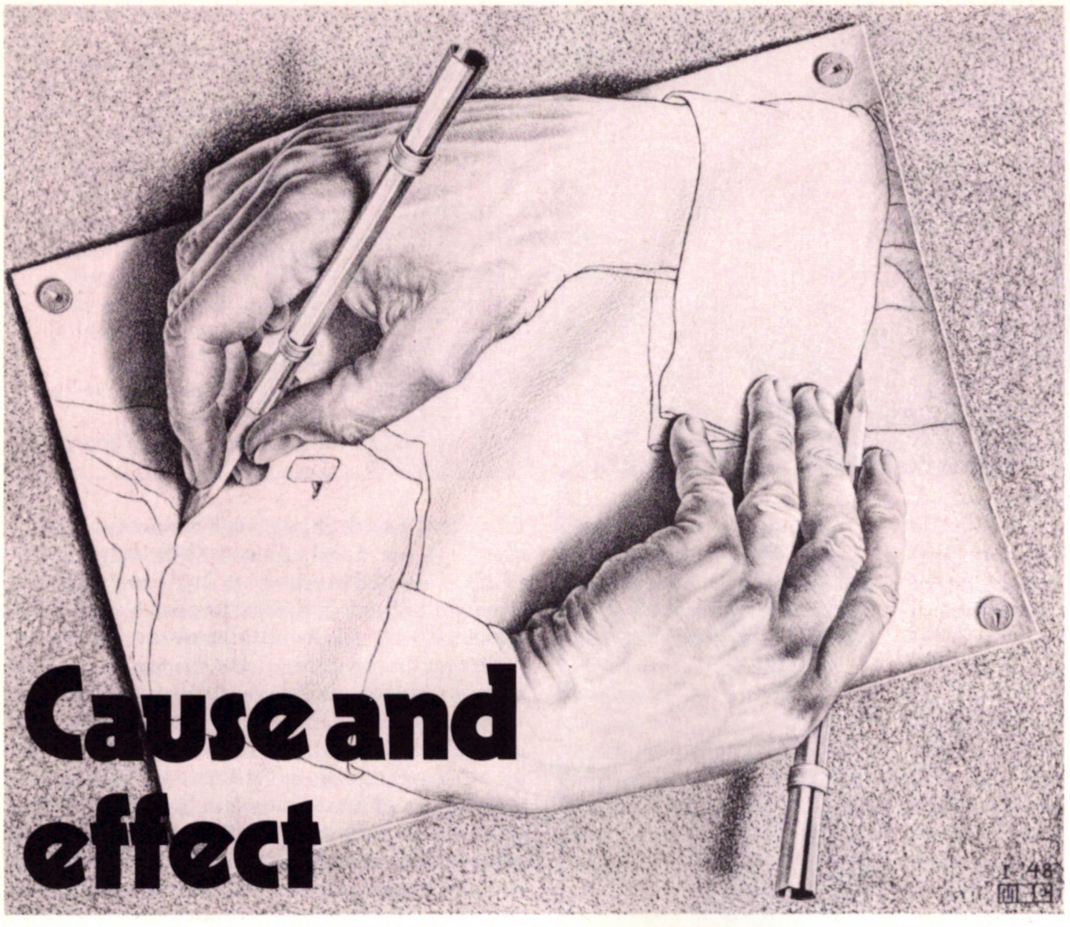
They also point out that certain yellow-green patches on some rocks near the Viking 1 lander were seen to change slowly in colour and shape. This could be due to wind and the lander's own activities, but it might be that the patches consist of lichen. Counting against this optimistic interpretation is the fact that organisms living on the surface of the planet would be exposed to fierce ultraviolet radiation from the Sun. And, of course, the failure to duplicate the Viking results using simulated soils may be due to nothing more than our ignorance of the detailed physical and chemical nature of the Martian soil.

Whatever the truth is, it is clear that Mars is not teeming with life. It has been suggested that Martian micro-organisms may exist in detectable numbers in certain favoured locations, such as the polar regions, where water is abundant. Plans for future Mars exploration include a robot vehicle that could rove the deserts on caterpillar tracks in search of pockets of life.

But the only way of tackling the question of life on Mars that is likely to settle the matter would be enormously costly. It would involve bringing soil samples from Mars to Earth. There, scientific tests would discover whether the cargo included the most valuable payload of all – living Martians.

Further reading

Eric Burgess, *To the red planet*, Columbia University Press (New York) 1978
Peter Francis, *The planets*, Penguin 1981
Patrick Moore, *Guide to Mars*, Butterworth 1977



Creator and creation are inextricably mixed in this arresting print by the Dutch artist M.C. Escher. A 'real' hand makes a drawing of a hand – which leaves the page, becomes 'real' and draws . . . the first hand. This is a striking metaphor for the emerging view of the Universe: the theories and beliefs of the scientist, apparently moulded by reality, become an important factor in shaping that reality

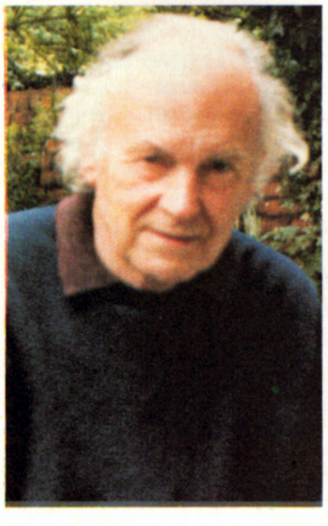
Cause and effect

Scientists' confidence might be shaken if they were forced to acknowledge that they are unwitting actors in their own experiments. But, as A.J. ELLISON shows, some have already had to face up to this possibility

NEW SCIENTIFIC THEORIES that do not seem to agree with what is thought to be known are frequently rejected without a careful examination. Innovators who have been able to overcome their own educational conditioning to create original ideas are obliged to put up with this sort of response from the scientific 'establishment' until the day when their ideas become generally accepted – and, probably, become a new orthodoxy. The idea that scientific investigators and their collaborators are an integral part of their own experiments is such an idea.

I had an experience of the inability of scientists to face this possibility in my own laboratory. I was studying a well-known British psychic. He was apparently creating paranormal physical effects in a complex apparatus in which an infra-red beam was produced and its intensity measured by electronic circuitry. The psychic was apparently able to cause a sudden drop in the reading indicating the beam's intensity. (Whether it was the beam's actual intensity or the measuring instrument that was affected is uncertain.) The effect was repeated a number of times and seemed so clear and definite that I fetched three colleagues who were not part of the team, as independent witnesses. All fully understood the 'normal' electrical engineering and physics. They watched the effect being produced several times to order. Two of them were fascinated, declaring that they did not understand how it could possibly occur. They readily agreed to their names being quoted as witnesses. The third stated that 'there must be an explanation', even if he had not yet found it, and practically ran from the laboratory. He reduced the stress of this clash between what he was seeing with his own eyes and the received ideas of orthodoxy by refusing to admit the facts at all.

Brian Inglis, writer on the paranormal and consultant to *The Unexplained*, has come across examples of biological experiments in which success or failure apparently depended on psychic influences from the researcher



Every researcher knows of experiments that did not give the expected results; the phenomenon is very common. Usually it is assumed that something went wrong and the experiment is repeated until it does give the 'correct' result. One wonders how many research students who do not clearly understand what the result of an experiment is supposed to be produce anomalous results – sometimes by their own unrecognised psychic ability – and are told to repeat the procedure until they get a more acceptable result. Perhaps the spoon-bending children who appeared following Uri Geller's television shows were able to produce paranormal results because they did not know that they were impossible – at least, according to their physics teachers.

The psychical researcher Rhea White has

made the point forcefully:

> the experimenter has been a neglected variable in parapsychological research. . . . There could hardly be a more significant area of investigation than the role of the experimenter, because not only may the achievement of extrachance results depend on the experimenter, but the experimenter may also affect the nature of the results obtained.

Perhaps the most important factor in successful experiments in psychical research is intense and sustained enthusiasm, and a desire on the part of the experimenter to get the best out of the subjects. This level of enthusiasm seemed to be present during the experiment with the British psychic mentioned above. It appears when the right people are present, and it must be carefully nurtured. Such an occasion is like a comet: its imminent arrival can be recognised, but it is not repeatable to order. The impressive paranormal events that can be brought about spring up and die down, and the skilful researcher must be ready for them – equipped to record them on audio- and videotape, and by other means, and to have witnesses present.

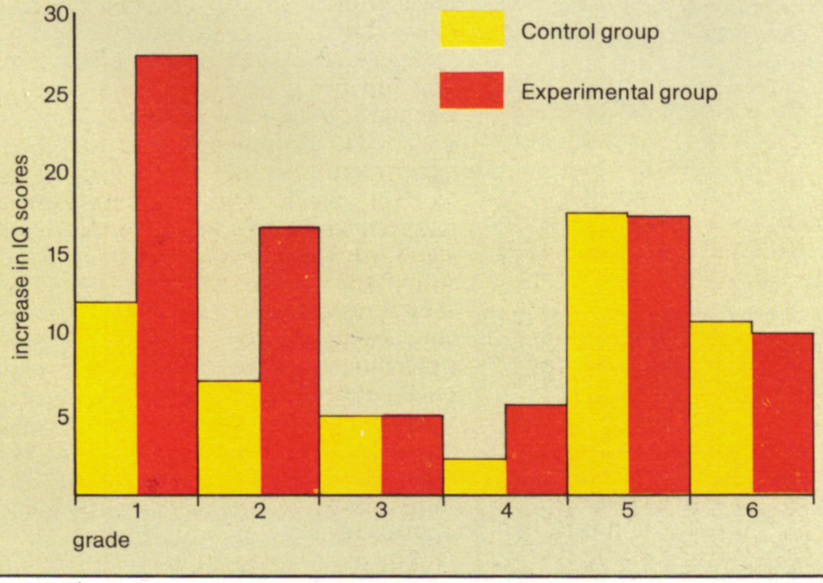
This phenomenon is by no means confined to psychical research. Brian Inglis describes the experience of the noted biologist Neil Miller. Miller wanted to find out whether rats could learn to control certain bodily functions – an ability that would upset conventional ideas about the workings of their nervous systems. With difficulty he found an assistant willing to collaborate on the experiments. They discovered that rats could indeed learn to alter blood pressure, heart rate, the temperature of one ear independently of the other, and other functions. Even though this sounded wildly improbable, other researchers were able to repeat the experiments and published their results during 1959.

Several years later Inglis visited Miller and discovered that he had been unable to repeat the results at this later date. The progressive decline of the results was inexplicable to Miller. He might have been completely discredited as a scientist if it had not been found in the 1960s that human beings could learn to control bodily functions, such as heart rate, previously thought to be completely automatic and independent of conscious control. Inglis suggests that psychic abilities of Miller or his assistant, or someone else involved in the experiment, might have played a role in his early success – and for some reason this ability declined subsequently.

A similar decline in experimental success occurred with Albert B. Sabin, the famous discoverer of a polio vaccine. He thought he had obtained reliable evidence that the virus

The favoured few

Psychologists are learning a great deal about the surprising ways in which human beings can influence the results obtained in supposedly objective tests. A classic demonstration was made by Robert Rosenthal and Lenore Jacobson in an American elementary school. They asked teachers to administer a non-verbal intelligence test to children in all six grades (ages 5 to 11). They then misled the teachers: they told them that the results indicated that certain children, who were named to the teachers, would show marked gains in their scores during the coming year. In reality these children had been selected randomly. They represented one fifth of all the pupils. Eight months later the teachers again administered the tests. The graph (left) shows the results. In all grades there was an average increase in test scores; but in grades 1 and 2 the children who had been marked out as promising made much greater gains than the rest. Some of the classes were tested by an educator from another school. She obtained the same results. In some unknown way the teachers' expectations about their pupils had called forth improved results.



Such effects can appear in very unexpected places. Before this work with schoolchildren, Rosenthal had studied behavioural scientists working with rats. Some researchers were told that their rats had been bred for intelligence; others were told that theirs had been bred for dullness. The results they obtained in such apparently straightforward tests as maze-running confirmed the supposed brightness or stupidity of the rats – which were, of course, a randomly selected sample.

that causes herpes also caused many human cancers. Later he was quite unable to obtain the same results.

There are many examples of carefully controlled scientific trials that have produced such strongly conflicting results that the effects of the experimenters' beliefs and attitudes must be seriously considered. The best known data on the effects of the experimenters' expectations about the outcomes of the experiment were provided by Robert Rosenthal in 1966. They are widely quoted, but also widely criticised. However, he makes it clear that careful thought must go into the design of experiments in human behaviour, and experimental psychologists must be suspected of the same kinds of errors as parapsychologists.

An interesting study was carried out by the American parapsychologist J.C. Crumbaugh in 1958. He had been unsuccessful in his attempts to demonstrate paranormal effects and had decided that the personality of the experimenter must be an important factor. With the help of the staff at the Parapsychology Laboratory at Duke University, North Carolina, he designed a series of experiments. He worked with 16 subjects and 16 experimenters, working in long and short sessions. He studied the personalities and attitudes of both subjects and experimenters, and rated them according to their degree of self-confidence or insecurity, and their degree of belief or disbelief in ESP. He obtained results in the expected direction – that is, with the self-confident participants who believed in the possibility of success. He then refined the experimental design and repeated it, using only long sessions. No significant ESP results showed up.

Albert B. Sabin shows how his polio vaccine is administered. At one time Sabin thought he had demonstrated that certain human cancers are carried by viruses; but after a while he found himself unable to obtain the same experimental results. Was the change due to random disturbances – or to some change in his own attitude to his work?

Nevertheless, though he used 16 experimenters, Crumbaugh remained the principal experimenter: it is still possible that his own conviction that he could not succeed in ESP experiments inhibited his results. For there is no doubt that different experimenters obtain different results in similar psi tests.

Brian Inglis delivered the J.B. Rhine lecture to the Parapsychological Association in 1980. Its theme was of great importance in this area. His title was: 'Power corrupts; scepticism corrodes'. Many parapsychologists tend to be sceptical of the existence of the phenomena they study, though often

Getting the drift

When Einstein's theory of relativity became the orthodoxy of the scientific world, conflicting theories and experiments had difficulty in gaining a hearing – just as relativity itself had at first been rejected as inconceivable. The most distinguished physicist to bring contrary evidence was an American, Dayton C. Miller. He repeated the experiment of A.A. Michelson and E.W. Morley, first performed in 1887, which had come to be regarded as the cornerstone of the experimental evidence for relativity. It involved comparing the time of travel of two light beams along different paths. When Michelson and Morley performed the experiment, they expected that the 'wind' of ether (the hypothetical medium in which light waves travelled) would affect a beam travelling parallel to the Earth's motion more severely than a beam travelling at right angles to it. But they could find no difference, and it was gradually accepted that the ether does not exist. (See page 803.)

From 1921 to 1926 Miller repeatedly carried out the Michelson-Morley experiment. His results varied – but he was convinced that they revealed an 'ether wind' with a speed of about 6 miles per second (10 kilometres per second) – one third of the Earth's speed around the Sun.

This work was sufficiently respected to win Miller a prize of $1000 from the American Academy of Sciences. No one had demonstrated any flaw in it by the time of Miller's death in 1941. But the implication that ether drift was detectable was rejected. Other experiments supported relativity, and in due course the Michelson-Morley experiment was repeated with other types of radiation, such as radio and radar, with no sign of ether drift.

In the 1950s Miller's results were closely analysed, and the investigators concluded that his results had been partly due to temperature fluctuations and partly due to random disturbances. But long before this reasoned criticism was made, the mass of scientists had assumed that something 'must' be wrong with such heretical results.

they are quite unconscious of this resistance. Consequently they refuse to accept almost any effect, no matter how unequivocal the evidence for it, for fear of being 'conned'.

The orthodox scientist will protest at this point. 'This is manifest nonsense!' he will say. 'You are suggesting that whatever nonsensical pseudo-scientific idea anyone comes up with is verifiable!'

Not at all: this does not necessarily follow. Take the morphogenetic field as an example (see page 1461). The field was postulated to explain the course of past evolution, and the development of living individuals throughout the course of their lives. These processes existed long before there was any Rupert Sheldrake to propose the existence of the field. But if its existence is confirmed at some future date, it will be by the demonstration of further effects and properties of the field manifesting themselves in new experimental arrangements. And it may be that, initially, some experimenters are more successful in demonstrating it than others. It is possible that these discoveries will not be made until scientific thinking is substantially in accord with them, when there will be a great weight of detailed thinking behind the notion of the morphogenetic field.

The opinions prevailing among the non-scientific public may also be highly important in determining what experimental results can be obtained. And these can be swayed by the opinions of noted scientists. However, it is probably the whole formed by the subjects and the experimenter that is of primary importance.

Patterns of guessing

There are, of course, ways in which the attitudes and beliefs of experimenters and subjects can influence the results without involving paranormal agencies. Subjects frequently tend to avoid calling the same card twice in a row during card-guessing experiments. This may be a quite unconscious habit, or it may be due to a belief that 'lightning doesn't strike twice in the same place'. In fact, if the drawing of the cards is truly random, all cards are equally likely to be drawn on any occasion, no matter what the previous card has been (provided each card is returned to the pack before the next draw). Someone else might have a preference for calling a particular type of card, and so on. If the card-drawing is not completely random, the biases of the subject may result in scores that are significantly above or below those that would be expected by pure chance – even if no paranormal factor is involved.

There is a tragic and highly controversial example of what may be an unusual case of the experimenter effect. The important experiments of S.G. Soal, a former president of the British Society for Psychical Research, have been widely regarded as outstanding in their class. They were card-guessing experiments that apparently demonstrated the existence of telepathy. A later computer analysis of his results indicated that the figure 1 had been altered to 4 or 5 in various places. Subsequently an independent observer at Soal's experiments claimed that she had seen him making such alterations. (See page 14.)

This was a shattering discovery to parapsychologists. Some of them have seriously suggested that an alternative to conscious fraud is possible. The changes may have been made quite unwittingly by Soal: his subconscious mind may have seized on this as a way of obtaining the results that he so passionately desired.

Cynics will scoff at this explanation, of course. They will classify Soal with those physical mediums who have been caught cheating when supposedly in trance during seances. But I am fairly sure that in at least some cases these mediums too were not cheating consciously and deliberately: they were in an 'altered state of consciousness', in which their normal mind was not in control.

Top: S.G. Soal conducted a classic series of experiments apparently demonstrating the existence of telepathy. But he had altered certain figures in his results, thus giving his subjects a spuriously high success rate

Above: J.B. Rhine and his wife Louisa. The most impressive demonstrations of ESP by the Rhines occurred early in their career, when, as J.B. Rhine believed, their enthusiasm was at its height

Of course, it is deplorable that the experimental conditions during these seances and during Soal's experiments were so faulty that this 'cheating' could take place. We are learning rapidly, and the rate of learning is increasing. We can now record the activities of all participants in an experiment, and analyse the results completely automatically, thus circumventing most of these earlier difficulties. Thus the enthusiasm and optimism of experimenters and subjects are able to contribute to the success of the experiment, without distorting the results.

What the psychical researchers are bringing out – and this is perhaps the special importance of the topic – is the influence of human views and expectations in *all* experiments. This factor may well be the explanation of the anomalous results that do not find their way into the orthodox scientific literature. Gradually it is being appreciated by scientists – but not yet sufficiently.

Further reading

Fritjof Capra, *The tao of physics*, Fontana 1976
R. Rosenthal, *Experimenter effects in behavioral research*, Appleton-Century-Crofts (New York) 1966
B.B. Wolman (ed.), *Handbook of parapsychology*, Van Nostrand Rheinhold (New York) 1977

Whispers from the past

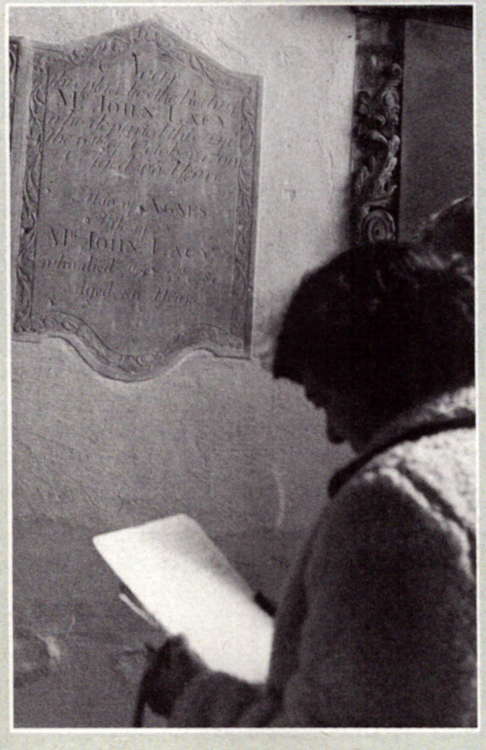
Medium Margo Williams claims to receive, through dictation by the dead, pleas for help, which she regards as her special mission to fulfil. But, asks ROY STEMMAN, how convincing are these 'spirit' messages?

ONE BRIGHT spring morning in 1976, Margo Williams was busy in the kitchen of her home in Ventnor, Isle of Wight, when she was startled by a woman's voice saying, 'My name is Jane.'

Margo turned with alarm to see who had entered the house, but there was no one there. Immediately, however, she had an overwhelming urge to pick up a pencil and write down what her invisible guest said; but later she could make little sense of her notes.

'Jane' dictated another message two days later and she returned on over 70 further occasions, telling a little about herself each time. She was, she said, a housewife from the mid Victorian period and she had lived in a seaside town in Devon. Margo's husband Wally began researching the scripts to see if he could verify the information given by their 'spirit' guest. When Jane said her family doctor's name was Mackenzie, Wally wrote to the Wellcome Medical History Library and discovered that there had been a doctor of that name with a practice in Sidmouth, Devon, at the time Jane said she had been alive. This, said Wally, 'fitted the facts perfectly'.

By this time Jane had been joined by numerous other communicators. 'We've had people from all walks of life,' Wally explains. 'Men and women, from humble servants to the top brass of the world in different forms. There have been civilians, military, clergy, doctors – you name it, we've had it: an ever-increasing variety. At first it was very much a Victorian thing, but the time zone has extended and we have even heard from a woman called Margaret who died just after AD 1500.'



Below: Farnham parish church in Surrey, where Margo Williams, accompanied by author Roy Stemman, received an automatically written script allegedly from the spirit of John Lacey, who was searching for his wife Ann. Later, a tablet (inset) was discovered in the church, giving the name John *Lacy* and his wife's name as Agnes

These voices from the past are known to psychical researchers as 'drop-in' communicators because they appear without rhyme or reason – unlike the 'spirits' of seances who apparently return to speak to their relatives or friends. But if the dead really were dictating Margo Williams's scripts, why were they doing it? Or could it be that the medium was deluding herself into believing that she was in touch with the next world?

It is not easy to answer these questions on the evidence of the scripts alone. If the information they contain is proved accurate by research, then critics could rightly suggest that the medium or her husband may have acquired that information normally and presented it as 'spirit messages'. Or perhaps Margo had read the information earlier in her life and forgotten it, and it was now being

dredged up by her subconscious in the form of scripts.

I first met Margo in 1978 and was impressed by her sincerity and down-to-earth attitude to the phenomena. Wally, on the other hand, seemed to over-emphasise its importance, seeing great significance in every enigmatic word or odd coincidence.

During this meeting we discussed Appuldurcombe House, a ruin near Wroxall, on the Isle of Wight. The house is not said to be haunted, but when Mrs Jenny Gibbons, a friend of the Williamses, visited the place she felt very uneasy and decided to ask Margo and Wally if they could pick up anything psychically.

Soon after arriving at the ruin, on 24 June 1978, Margo heard a woman's voice and began writing. The script is typical of those received by the medium:

> Please, please, hear me. He desired me. He said I was comely. I was but a dairymaid here. Please, please, I have waited so long, so long. Old Targett, my father. Been here for years. Please, please hear me. His tongue as sweet as honey, so pleading with me. I met him by the big clump of trees where he deflowered me.
>
> Richard, where are you? Please help me, please, please. My baby I called Thomas. Please, please help me to find him. He cared not how I fared after he gave me some money. My pa was so upset. Please, please, I try to look for him. . . . Until I find Richard I will stay by the house for eternity. Please help me find Richard. . . . 'Ee called me Mary, where art'ee Richard? 'Ee was the only one who called me Mary. . . .

Margo Williams receives a script in the grounds of Waverley Abbey, Surrey. The communicator claimed to be a young woman who had lived in Waverley Abbey House, a mansion nearby. Like many automatic scripts, the information given was insufficient to provide the basis for a detailed investigation

Moved by her plea, the Williamses conducted their own research to see if Mary Targett really existed. They were almost at the point of giving up when Wally discovered a book entitled *The Oglander memoirs* in which there was a chapter headed 'Ye history of ye Worsley family', written by Sir John Oglander (1595–1648). Reading through the chapter, Wally found an account of a man named Richard Worsley, who was the equivalent of governor of the island around 1550; he had produced a bastard son Thomas by a dairymaid, Mary Targett.

A spirit found

On discovering that Richard Worsley had died in 1565 and was buried on the Isle of Wight at Godshill, Wally went with Margo and Jenny Gibbons in search of his grave. And the ghost of Mary Targett apparently went with them. For, in the church, using Richard's tomb as a writing table, Margo received a final, poignant message from the ghost of Appuldurcombe House: 'I have found 'ee Richard! Thank 'ee, thank 'ee. I can go onwards. Richard I love 'ee.'

This reunion reduced the three earthly 'witnesses' to tears. Sceptics, however, would remain unimpressed. Perhaps the Williamses had concocted the whole thing, or Margo had read about Mary Targett in some other book.

During the next eight months Margo visited many other sites, taking dictation from 33 earthbound spirits, 12 of whom were subsequently identified by Wally. Several of them announced that they had been 'released' by the Williamses' intervention.

Here, it seemed, was something that could be put to the test. I invited Margo and her husband to visit the mainland and join me on a ghost hunt in Hampshire and Surrey – a challenge they readily accepted. I selected a number of places to visit, some of which were reputedly haunted and others that, as far as I knew, had no ghosts at all. I did not tell the Williamses where I was taking them.

We went first to the ruin of Waverley Abbey, which had been founded in 1128 by the White Monks of the Cistercian Order. Margo wandered through the remains of the abbey, then began to write furiously in her notebook; the communicator was a young woman who claimed to have lived in Waverley Abbey House.

At the parish church of Farnham, Margo received a script from one John Lacey, who was searching for his wife Ann. And while we were taking a pub lunch, at the William Cobbett in Farnham, the ghost of Sir Reginald Bloomfield 'appeared'. He revealed that he had designed the chancel of an

unusual church some way away. 'I travelled in my carriage,' he said. 'The fair lady I had an assignation with was staying here. . . .'

I thought Farnborough Abbey in Hampshire might have a ghost or two. The bodies of Napoleon III and his wife, the Empress Eugénie, are in its vaults. The French Emperor came to England after he was deposed in 1871, dying two years later at Chislehurst in Kent. While Wally and I discussed the history of the abbey with a guide, Margo found a quiet corner where she received a script from one of her regular communicators, Captain Charles Bennett. 'There are bodies where no souls dwell now,' he told us, adding that the Empress was now living another life on earth.

Our final visit was to Mytchett Place, which is occupied by the Royal Army Medical Corps. I knew that a variety of ghostly happenings had been reported in recent times, and that Rudolph Hess, Hitler's deputy, was imprisoned there during the war, after he had parachuted into Scotland on an unsuccessful peace mission. I told Margo nothing. The communication she received was from a man who had stayed there, at an unspecified date, and had been burned after a cigar fell on his bed sheets.

Rather than visit more sites, we agreed that Margo would return to some of those already mentioned in the hope that she would receive more information, and more scripts were produced.

So had Margo Williams's scripts proved her claim that the dead were communicating with her? I had to conclude that, on this occasion, they had not.

At only two of the locations did a communicator provide a full name. 'John Lacey' dictated his message at Farnham church. On the wall of the church we found a stone tablet recording the death of 'Mr John Lacy' (note the different spelling) on 6 October 1766. But Margo had walked past the stone before receiving the script, so she could have seen the inscription, consciously or subconsciously. The tablet also recorded the death of Lacy's wife Agnes in 1784. Margo's script referred to the wife as Ann.

In the William Cobbett pub, Sir Reginald Bloomfield interrupted our lunch to tell us about a lady love he had visited there. He mentioned designing a church chancel. The man concerned was easy to identify, even though the spelling of his name was incorrect: it should have been Blomfield. He was a noted church architect in the Surrey and Hampshire area and his name is to be found in most reference books relating to southern England. Strange, then, that he should 'appear' in a pub. There was no way that we could verify his story. The same was true of the other communicators, who gave even fewer clues as to their identities.

Although that investigation failed to provide evidence that Margo Williams was in touch with various spirits, this does not necessarily mean that the information in her scripts was not obtained paranormally. Late in 1979 Margo's psychic talents became more varied; to include healing and physical manifestations – a silver glitter appeared on her hands and body when she was 'achieving release of earthbound spirits'. Perhaps investigation of these facets of her work will provide proof of her paranormal powers.

But for the time being, the intriguing case of Margo Williams serves to show just how difficult it is at times to prove – or disprove – mediums' claims.

Above: Margo in front of Waverley Abbey House

Right: Margo receives a script in the William Cobbett public house, Farnham. It was here that a Sir Reginald Bloomfield communicated; he said he had met a lady love there and that he had designed a church chancel. Sir Reginald *Blom*field was a noted architect who had lived in the area and designed many churches there. Most reference books about Surrey and Hampshire mention him, and Margo could easily have read about him – yet who is to say that this communication is not genuine?

Further reading

Margo Williams, *Ghostly gifts*, Margo Williams 1980
William Sharp/Fiona Macleod, *The Wilfion scripts*, Wilfion Books 1980

Post script

Your letters to THE UNEXPLAINED

Dear Sir,
I should like to tell you about an experience a friend and I shared at the time of the Italian earthquakes in the winter of 1980 to 1981.

One night, my friend was visiting me at my house. Before he left, he picked up issue 6 of *The Unexplained* and leafed through it. On reaching page 110, he suddenly looked at the picture of nine-year-old Eryl Mai Jones, the little girl who had dreamed of the Aberfan landslide the night before the disaster happened, and was killed in it.

The next morning, I was woken up by the telephone ringing. It was my friend, who sounded quite agitated. He told me that he had had a very frightening dream: he had been walking along a deserted main road behind the girl from Aberfan, when she turned her head to look at a block of flats at the side of the road – and they crumbled and fell. He said that he somehow remembered that the numbers three, six and nine kept cropping up.

After he had finished talking, I looked at the morning paper – and was astounded to see that an earthquake had hit Naples. Nearly all the death tolls had the figures three, six or nine in them.
Yours faithfully,
Charles Myatt Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk

Dear Sir,
I am writing to tell you about an experience I had as a child, which may be of interest to you.

We lived in a flat above the showroom of a garage of which my father was foreman. One night the spraying shop across the road caught fire and, although we were in no immediate danger, my father woke my sister. She sat by the window and watched the fire, while I lay sound asleep in the same room. Apparently, there were quite a few policemen and fire engines down in the forecourt, and after an hour or so the fire was put out.

The next morning, my father woke me and told me of the events of the night. My first words were 'What – again?' Then I sat up in bed and told him exactly what had happened the night before, accurate in every detail, even down to a conversation between my father and a fireman. My father was amazed. I can't explain how I knew what had happened, as my sister confirmed that I was fast asleep for the entire duration of the fire.
Yours faithfully,
J. Cockett (Mrs) Doncaster, South Yorkshire

Dear Sir,
In issue 43 of *The Unexplained*, I read with interest the article on stigmatics [see page 846]. I do not doubt that stigmatism is real. But the thing I found interesting and enigmatic is this.

If one studies the method of crucifixion employed in biblical times, one finds that the nails were not driven through the palm of the hand, but through the wrist; the flesh of the palm would tear under the weight of the body.

Now, until recently it was generally believed that the nail was driven through the palms. Thus stigmatics who believe this produce wounds in the palms of their hands. In other words, I think stigmatism is a form of psychosomatic disorder. I wonder what the result would have been if from very early times all reference to the crucifixion, and all paintings, had shown Christ with nails through the wrist.
Yours faithfully,
Bill Hoffman Burnley, Lancashire

Dear Sir,
I feel that an obvious point was missed in your articles on the Cottingley fairies (pages 381, 414 and 434) on the subject of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's readiness to believe that fairies are real.

To the great embarrassment of the Doyle family, Charles Doyle (Arthur's father) spent several years in mental asylums, suffering from what has been variously described as epilepsy or, worse still, alcoholism. During his spells in the asylums, he produced several illustrated journals, one of which was published in facsimile form by Paddington Press in 1978. From this diary it is clear that Charles Doyle was not only interested in supernatural things – a not uncommon Victorian preoccupation – but specifically in the fairy world. He drew several sketches of fairies with flowers and animals, including an elaborate fantasy of elves on horseback frolicking around the eaves of the asylum roof (above). Another sketch, labelled 'horse's toilette', depicts an elf combing a horse's forelock. Under it, Charles wrote: 'This is true as I can draw it' and 'I have seen a green lad just like it.'

Was this mere imagination? Perhaps Arthur Conan Doyle's keen pursuit of fairy matters was an unconscious effort to establish his father's sanity.
Yours faithfully,
Leon Berger London

Send *your* letters to THE UNEXPLAINED, Orbis House, 20–22 Bedfordbury, London WC2N 4BT

Information requested

Many readers have written to *The Unexplained* asking for addresses of various organisations and publications. We thought it would be helpful if we printed these for you to keep for future reference.

UFO organisations

British UFO Research Association
Secretary: Mrs Betty Wright
6 Cairn Avenue
London W5 5HX

Northern UFO Investigators Network
8 Whitethroat Walk
Birchwood, Warrington
Cheshire WA3 6PQ

Ground Saucer Watch
13238 N. 7th Drive
Phoenix, Arizona 85029
USA

Center for UFO Studies
PO Box 1402
Evanston, IL 60204
USA

For other international UFO organisations, see page 169.

Research into psychic and anomalous phenomena

Society for Psychical Research
1 Adam and Eve Mews
London W8 6UG

Association for the Scientific Study of Anomalous Phenomena
Membership Secretary
6 Colwyn House
Cosser Street
London SE1 7BY

College of Psychic Studies
16 Queensbury Place
London SW7 2EB

Alternative medicine

Acupuncture Association and Register
34 Alderney Street
London SW1V 4EU

The British Medical Association
Medical Practices Advisory Bureau
BMA House
Tavistock Square
London WC1H 9JP

British Homoeopathic Association
27a Devonshire Street
London W1N 1RJ

Hypnotherapy Centre
67 Upper Berkeley Street
London W1H 7DH

Dowsing and leys

British Society of Dowsers
Sycamore Cottage
Tamley Lane
Hastingleigh
Kent TN25 5HW

Institute of Geomantic Research
Enquiries: Mrs A. Pennick
142 Pheasant Rise
Bar Hill
Cambridgeshire CB3 8SD

Publications

Fortean Times
(a contemporary record of strange phenomena)
BM-Fortean Times
London WC1N 3XX

Flying Saucer Review
FSR Publications Ltd
West Malling
Kent ME19 6JZ

The Ley Hunter
PO Box 13
Welshpool, Powys
Wales

Zetetic Scholar
(a review of claims of anomalies and the paranormal)
Department of Sociology
Eastern Michigan University
Ypsilanti, MI 4819
USA